Overview

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Canada and the Commonwealth

Introduction

With the gradual transformation of the British Empire into the modern Commonwealth, there has been much speculation about the possible demise of the Commonwealth itself. But, on the contrary, this multicultural and multiracial association of 49 nations, comprising more than one quarter of the world's population, is more alive and active today than ever before. The year 1987 is especially important for Canada's role within the Commonwealth because Vancouver has been chosen to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in the fall of 1987. It is during the CHOGM, held every two years, that important policy directions are adopted.

The modern Commonwealth has slowly evolved from its origin in the British Empire to a free association of independent member states that recognize Queen Elizabeth II as its symbolic Head. Since the very beginning of this process, Canadians have played a significant role in Commonwealth affairs.

The 1986 "mini-CHOGM" in London demonstrated the process of consensus politics at work. Not all participants subscribed to all the proposed measures of economic sanctions against South Africa, but all Heads of Government joined in insisting on the very foundation on which the Commonwealth was built — racial equality and representative government. By their action, the Heads of Government have ensured that the Commonwealth will continue to be one of the multinational institutions that works well and contributes to international peace and co-operation.

External Affairs Canada
Affaires extérieures Canada

History

The modern Commonwealth grew from the post-war currents of decolonization, but its beginnings were deeply rooted in British imperial history. Changes in its name reflected changing global realities: the British Empire became the British Commonwealth and then the Commonwealth of Nations or simply the Commonwealth.

This evolution from Empire to Commonwealth began in Canada in the last century. The British North America Act of 1867 made Canada the first Dominion, a status which eventually came to imply equality with Britain. Australia achieved Dominion status in 1900, South Africa in 1910 and the Irish Free State in 1921. India's decision in 1949 to remain in the Commonwealth after becoming an independent Republic was made possible by a new formula which no longer required allegiance to the Crown, something many nations could not accept.

From 1960 onward the Commonwealth expanded rapidly. Its multiracial character was reinforced as countries in the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean joined others from Africa and Asia.

The Commonwealth Today

Today the Commonwealth is a unique voluntary association linking 49 independent nations across the globe. Bringing together developed and developing countries, small island nations and continental land masses, the Commonwealth includes over one billion people. About 60 per cent of this population is under the age of 25.

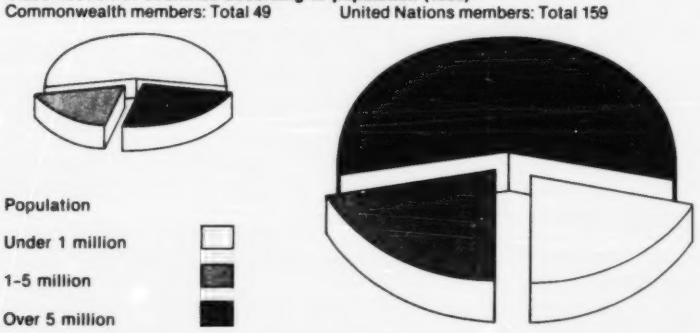
One important factor in the success of the modern Commonwealth is the existence of its central co-ordinating organization — the Commonwealth Secretariat. It was established in 1965 in London, England, to facilitate co-ordination and consultation in all areas of Commonwealth joint endeavour. The Secretariat is instrumental in organizing the co-operative efforts of Commonwealth members to assist with economic and social development, especially of smaller member countries.

The Secretariat is headed by a Secretary-General who is appointed by the Heads of Government. At present, Shridath Ramphal, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Justice in Guyana, heads the Secretariat. Member countries staff the Secretariat with international civil servants and English is the common working language.

All Commonwealth countries make assessed or voluntary financial contributions to a variety of Commonwealth activities. The Secretariat provides information and assistance to governments, as in the drafting of legislation, the handling of international trade negotiations and the organizing of government services. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) is the largest Commonwealth development program. Other activities include the Youth Program, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Program, and the activities of the Women's Unit.

One of the most innovative and successful co-ordinating mechanisms pioneered by the Commonwealth is the holding of regular

Classification of countries according to population (1983)



meetings by the Heads of the Commonwealth Governments. The meetings have been able to retain a high degree of informality rarely seen at other large international gatherings. Difficult issues are often left for a weekend retreat where the attending leaders benefit from an atmosphere of informality and small-group meetings. Such informal settings facilitate solutions to difficult problems.

The Heads of Government meetings have resulted in a number of important milestones over the years. These include the Gleneagles Agreement against sporting contacts with South Africa (1977), and the Lusaka Accord (1979) which made possible the orderly transition to independence of Zimbabwe and the first truly democratic elections in that country, which were witnessed by a Commonwealth observer group. The 1985 Nassau meeting produced the Commonwealth Accord on Southern Africa.

The biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings provide the highest level of consultation and guidance for functional co-operation. Additionally, there are periodic meetings of Commonwealth Ministers responsible for finance, law, industry, health, employment, agriculture, women's affairs and education.

Beyond the official organization and its agencies is the "unofficial" Commonwealth of close to 300 non-governmental organizations. Thousands of individuals in the Commonwealth are linked by an extensive international network of professional and interest groups. Together, they form a grass-roots base that ensures a continuing vitality. They include, for example, the various Commonwealth associations for architects, journalists and engineers. The Commonwealth Games and the Commonwealth Arts Festival, held every four years, reinforce links of friendship and co-operation and underline the multiracial, multicultural character of the Commonwealth.

Canada's Role in the Commonwealth

Canada has always been one of the strongest supporters of the Commonwealth and Canadians have played a major role in Commonwealth affairs. For example, Canada's role as the first self-governing Dominion and its part following World War I in gaining equal status for the dominions with Britain set an example for other colonies on their road to independence.

Former Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker was one of the leading figures in the condemnation of South Africa's *apartheid* policy. This led to the departure of that country from the association in 1961 and reinforced the Commonwealth principle of racial equality. A distinguished Canadian diplomat, Dr. Arnold Smith, served as the first Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Robert Stanfield, former Premier of Nova Scotia and Leader of the Federal Opposition, was recently appointed as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Foundation. Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark has provided ongoing moral leadership to the Commonwealth in the development of common actions to convince South Africa to abolish its *apartheid* policy. And Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, similarly to previous Canadian prime ministers, has shown through his continuous commitment that he believes the Commonwealth to be an agency of action and profound change.

As its second-largest financial contributor, Canada has provided fundamental and durable support to the Commonwealth. Canada has been responsible for many important Commonwealth initiatives: The present style and format of Heads of Government meetings, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Program, the concept of an annual Commonwealth Day (1975), and the decision to complement the Commonwealth Games with an arts festival were all introduced by Canada. It has also been in the forefront in introducing women's issues directly into the political process through ministerial meetings (1983), and in calling for an equal ratio between men and women in scholarship awards (1984).

Since the end of the Commonwealth trade preference, the Commonwealth has been less a focus of immediate Canadian commercial interests than in previous years. Although in 1985 Canadian exports worth some $3.5 billion went to Commonwealth countries, the percentage share of Canada's total world exports to the Commonwealth has fallen from about 20 per cent in the 1960s to 4 per cent in 1985, half of this being exports to Britain. However, Canada is developing potentially strong markets in

Countries of the Commonwealth

	Country	Population	Canadian Aid 1985/1986 ($ million)
1	Antigua and Barbuda	78 000	1.04
2	Bahamas	229 000	0.00
3	Barbados	253 000	6.61
4	Belize	156 000	3.95
5	Botswana	1 000 000	6.70
6	Britain	56 400 000	0.00
7	Canada	25 100 000	0.00
8	Cyprus	654 000	0.00
9	Dominica	77 000	8.45
10	The Gambia	718 000	1.26
11	Ghana	12 300 000	25.12
12	Grenada	94 000	6.08
13	Guyana	785 000	1.54
14	Jamaica	2 200 000	22.65
15	Kenya	19 600 000	32.25
16	Lesotho	1 500 000	7.02
17	Malawi	6 800 000	5.88
18	Malta	360 000	0.00
19	Nigeria	96 500 000	1.91
20	St. Christopher-Nevis	55 000	0.00
21	St. Lucia	134 000	1.17
22	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	117 000	1.08
23	Sierra Leone	3 700 000	1.28
24	Swaziland	731 000	6.00
25	Tanzania	21 500 000	41.50
26	Trinidad and Tobago	1 200 000	1.15
27	Uganda	15 000 000	3.52
28	Zambia	6 400 000	14.90
29	Zimbabwe	8 100 000	16.73
30	Australia	15 500 000	0.00
31	Bangladesh	98 100 000	107.07
32	Brunei Darussalam	218 000	0.00
33	Fiji	686 000	0.59
34	India	749 200 000	73.48
35	Kiribati	60 000	0.06
36	Malaysia	15 300 000	4.86
37	Maldives	173 000	0.02
38	Mauritius	1 000 000	0.30
39	Nauru	8 000	0.00
40	New Zealand	3 200 000	0.00
41	Papua New Guinea	3 400 000	0.71
42	Seychelles	65 000	0.00
43	Singapore	2 500 000	1.35
44	Solomon Islands	259 000	0.06
45	Sri Lanka	15 900 000	30.70
46	Tonga	106 000	0.06
47	Tuvalu	8 000	0.06
48	Vanuatu	130 000	0.18
49	Western Samoa	161 000	1.83

several Commonwealth countries and the Commonwealth remains important to Canada as a vehicle for assisting countries in their long-term economic development.

Canadian Aid to Commonwealth Countries

Canada's worldwide program of development assistance has its roots in the Commonwealth. As a number of countries in Asia shed their colonial status in the late 1940s, it became evident that without intensive economic and social development they would have difficulty in sustaining their political independence. In 1950, Canada joined Australia, Ceylon, Great Britain, India, New Zealand and Pakistan in establishing the Colombo Plan, which until 1958 was Canada's sole bilateral development assistance program.

Commonwealth ties have also determined the pattern and direction of Canada's development assistance program. As Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and Africa gained independence in the late fifties and early sixties, Canada became involved in development co-operation activities involving them. Today, Canadian development assistance is concentrated in 30 "core" countries, i.e., countries to which Canada has a long-term development commitment and for which it draws on all aid instruments.

In 1985, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided assistance to 44 of the 49 Commonwealth countries. Aid on a bilateral basis to Commonwealth countries constitutes close to 20 per cent of Canada's total development assistance program.

In 1986–87 Canada contributed $16.7 million to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), its largest single contributor. A Canadian is the current Managing Director of the Fund, which is based on the premise of mutual help and remains a pioneer in promoting technical co-operation among developing countries. All members contribute financially to its budget. An important instrument for establishing South/South co-operation, it draws over 60 per cent of its experts from developing Commonwealth countries. Training through the Fund is arranged almost exclusively in other developing Commonwealth countries. It has proven consistent in its capacity to respond quickly, with low administrative overheads, to requests for small-scale technical assistance from member countries.

The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles Issued by Commonwealth Heads of Government, Singapore, 1971

"The Commonwealth of Nations is a voluntary association of independent sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace.

"Members of the Commonwealth come from territories in the six continents and five oceans, include peoples of different races, languages and religions, and display every stage of economic development from poor developing nations to wealthy industrialized nations. They encompass a rich variety of cultures, traditions and institutions.

"Membership of the Commonwealth is compatible with the freedom of member governments to be non-aligned or to belong to any other grouping, association or alliance. Within this diversity all members of the Commonwealth hold certain principles in common. It is by pursuing these principles that the Commonwealth can continue to influence international society for the benefit of mankind.

"We believe that international peace and order are essential to the security and prosperity of mankind; we therefore support the United Nations and seek to strengthen its influence for peace in the world, and its efforts to remove the causes of tension between nations.

"We believe in the liberty of the individual, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief, and in their inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which they live. We therefore strive to promote in each of our countries those representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law that are our common heritage.

"We recognize racial prejudice as a dangerous sickness threatening the healthy development of the human race and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil of society. Each of us will vigorously combat this evil

within our own nation. No country will afford to regimes which practise racial discrimination assistance which in its own judgement directly contributes to the pursuit or consolidation of this evil policy.

"We oppose all forms of colonial domination and racial oppression and are committed to the principles of human dignity and equality. We will therefore use all our efforts to foster human equality and dignity everywhere, and to further the principles of self-determination and non-racialism.

"We believe that the wide disparities in wealth now existing between different sections of mankind are too great to be tolerated. They also create world tensions. Our aim is their progressive removal. We therefore seek to use our efforts to overcome poverty, ignorance and disease, in raising standards of living and achieving a more equitable international society.

"To this end our aim is to achieve the freest possible flow of international trade on terms fair and equitable to all, taking into account the special requirements of the developing countries, and to encourage the flow of adequate resources, including governmental and private resources, to the developing countries, bearing in mind the importance of doing this in a true spirit of partnership and of establishing for this purpose in the developing countries conditions which are conducive to sustained investment and growth.

"We believe that international co-operation is essential to remove the causes of war, promote tolerance, combat injustice, and secure development among the peoples of the world. We are convinced that the Commonwealth is one of the most fruitful associations for these purposes.

"In pursuing these principles the members of the Commonwealth believe that they can provide a constructive example of the multinational approach which is vital to peace and progress in the modern world. The association is based on consultation, discussion and co-operation.

"In rejecting coercion as an instrument of policy they recognize that the security of each member state from external aggression is a matter of concern to all members. It provides many channels for continuing exchanges of knowledge and views on professional, cultural, economic, legal and political issues among member states.

"These relationships we intend to foster and extend, for we believe that our multinational association can expand human understanding and understanding among nations, assist in the elimination of discrimination based on differences of race, colour or creed, maintain and strengthen personal liberty, contribute to the enrichment of life for all, and provide a powerful influence for peace among nations."